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Hungarian ethnography in a historical perspective

*An unpublished lecture by Gyula
Ortutay from 1937*

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On the initiative of the Institute of Sociology, London a sociological-ethnographic field work was conducted in Dudar, a village in Hungary, in September 1937. The participants came from England and Germany, while the event was organized by a Hungarian staff, the members of the College of Arts of the Szeged Youth.¹

For this occasion, a series of lectures were prepared and held by the members of this Szeged based organization and other Hungarian experts of social sciences and ethnography, including a paper by Béla Bartók too.² The

topics of these lectures covered the structure of the Hungarian peasant society, the Hungarian agrarian reform, the psychology of the Hungarian peasantry and different aspects of Hungarian ethnography. These papers were published in a bilingual edition, on the 60th anniversary of the Dudar research project,³ except for Gyula Ortutay's lecture on Hungarian folklore. It was not included for the simple reason that it was not yet available for the editors at the time of publication in 1997. It was only in 2013 that we could locate Ortutay's manuscript in the Archives of Keele University, where the papers of the Institute of Sociology are stored.⁴ In this article we publish the original English language version of this lecture.

Gyula Ortutay (1910–1978) was an outstanding scholar of Hungarian ethnography. He was a founding member of the College of Arts of the Szeged Youth – an organization whose members were young social scientists and artists, engaged in the betterment of the social status of the Hungarian peasantry. This group flourished in the 1930s, which coincided with the first prolific and significant period in Ortutay's scientific career as an ethnographer.

In this lecture, prepared for the prestigious guests from England and Germany, Ortutay's aim was to present a realistic general view of Hungarian ethnography. It includes a short history of the main topics and of the methodology of Hungarian ethnological research, with regard to the impacts of the international trends in this science.

The lecture covers almost every branch of Hungarian folklore, showing the process of transformation and disintegration of the traditional peasant society. Ortutay's reasoning is based on a wide repertoire of the then recent results of Hungarian ethnographical research, including the folk music collections by Bartók and Kodály, and his own experiences in the

¹ For more details see LENCSEs (2015a).

² Bartók's text on Hungarian peasant music was presented by his pupil and colleague, the Hungarian composer and folk music scholar Sándor Veress.

³ TRENCSENYI 1997.

⁴ Foundations of British Sociology Archive, Keele University Library. LP/4/1/3/7/10/3 i

field of folk tales. As this lecture was prepared for illustrious British and German scholars we can find plenty of examples from the culture of the countries where they came from. Ortutay quotes from Goethe's *Faust* in German, he mentions the *Grub Street Stories* and Scottish folk ballads, and refers to British and German scholars from Bishop Percy, Francis, James Child and Cecil Sharp to the Grimm brothers, Hans Naumann, and Adolf Bastian, author of the *Elementargedanke* theory. It is also remarkable that Ortutay finds the East-West relations as a crucial reference point for Hungarian culture and politics – a problem, which still lingers on. He feels it also important, in 1937, to distance himself from the “rather obscure” ideas comprised in the characterology of any social or national group, in this case the Hungarian peasantry, and from the “specious racial definitions”.

Keele University has two versions of Ortutay's text in its archives. The first is in the author's own typescript with hand-written corrections and there is a retyped, clean copy. All of the corrections and the retyping were made by Dorothea Farquharson, a member of the Institute of Sociology and the British organizer of the Dudar field work. After returning home from Hungary she worked on a volume to assemble and publish the results of the Dudar field research and the lectures held by the Hungarian experts, but this endeavour could not be accomplished. During these preparatory works Dorothea Farquharson, as a native speaker, felt it necessary to make some corrections in Ortutay's text.

These alterations affect the punctuation, the structure of a few sentences and to some extent Ortutay's terminology.⁵ Most of the corrections were necessary due to Ortutay's limited experience in writing in English, which resulted in minor errors and sometimes in a

somewhat complicated expression of thought. At some points, however, these modifications more or less altered the originally intended meaning of the text or even led to the misinterpretation of the author's thoughts.⁶ Therefore, while accepting Dorothea Farquharson's suggestions for punctuation we retain Ortutay's original text. At the same time we use a different font style for the words and sentences that required modification according to Dorothea Farquharson, and give her corrections in footnotes. This allows the reader to enjoy the richness of the original text with all of its minor mistakes and follow the whole editing process by the native speaker editor.⁷



Julius Ortutay⁸: Hungarian Folklore

Whenever we have to investigate – from whatever standpoint – the questions of intellectual life of the Hungarian people, we are always faced with that problem to hand primarily in its ethnical structure⁹ which our writers and politicians – and sometimes our scholars too – in the habit of characterising as the contrast¹⁰ between East and West. And indeed these¹¹ constant references¹² met with in connection with all our national and European problems must be

⁶ Nevertheless, these modifications in meaning and the misinterpretations are interesting in their own right and they can shed light on the difficulties of intercultural communication between the Hungarian and British social scientists. See e.g. footnotes 3, 7, 19, 35, 52 for minor changes, and 38 and 57 for misunderstandings.

⁷ For a Hungarian translation of Ortutay's lecture see LENCSEs 2015b. – It is worth to be mentioned, that Ortutay himself could not be present personally at the Dudar meeting. His lecture is, however, a valuable document of this event.

⁸ Ortutay used his name in this form in the manuscript.

⁹ DF: having to deal in its ethnical structure with that problem [„DF:” denotes Dorothea Farquharson's corrections]

¹⁰ DF: “conflict”

¹¹ DF: “The”

¹² DF: “references to this conflict”

⁵ For example, it was corrected when Ortutay inappropriately used the term *boorish* as a synonym of the attributes *primitive*, or *peasant* or *pagan*.

more than mere poetical or political catchwords or convenient formulas usually¹³ employed to shirk the insolvable. Western Europe too has at all times taken note of our existence in terms pregnant with under-appreciation¹⁴, - has always¹⁵ observed primarily the exotic and the oriental¹⁶; it is these peculiarities that¹⁷ have aroused Europe's interest and taken Europe's fancy, while¹⁸ we ourselves have time without endeavoured and struggled desperately and indignantly to prove that we are good Europeans or have in anger and scorn turned our backs on a Europe which has failed to understand us. It is not my object in this short address of an informative character to attempt to describe the historical background of the Hungarian attitude; but I had at least to refer it¹⁹, seeing that²⁰ when speaking of the folklore of Hungarian peasantry we are constantly being faced with this question.

To give only one instance, which may serve as a kind of starting-point, -²¹ a few days ago (on September the eight²²) we celebrated one of the Church festivals commemorating the Blessed Virgin Mary - the Day of Her Nativity²³. - For our peasantry that day is not only a Catholic festival, but a feast day of paramount importance for other reasons of a²⁴ by no means Christian origin. First of all it has a significance of pre-Christian origin, - it is the first day of Autumn. It is surrounded by a mass of ritual prohibitions: no woman's work must be done on this day, while willow branches, hay and apples are taken to church to be consecrated,

that they may be used to protect the cows against all kinds of diseases and spells. Naturally this instance too²⁵ shows clearly that the pagan beliefs - or rather non-Christian beliefs -²⁶ of the peasants are interwoven also with Christian elements. This is what we see also in the worship of the Virgin Mary - ancient²⁷ mythical beliefs absorbed²⁸ in the teachings of the Christian Church. Some Hungarian scholars have actually shown similarities between the motives of the worship of certain goddesses of the mythology of our racial kin in the North (this is true in particular²⁹ of the mordvin mythology) and those of the mariolatry of the Hungarian peasantry. All that this instance is intended for the present to prove is³⁰ that in the intellectual attitude of our peasantry we find this dualism³¹ in practically every instance; and even in cases where there can be no doubt about the European origin, we can trace these pagan and primitive or - if you prefer it - boorish³² elements: though it is equally true that on the other hand the boorish and³³ primitive peculiarities have in most cases been disguised by the higher culture of Europe. And this³⁴ dualism is one of the fundamental problems of Hungarian ethnography; and even though we may not perhaps accept the excessively simplifying³⁵ theory of Hans Naumann, it is indubitable that the cultural structure of our peasantry must be investigated simultaneously both from the standpoint of the higher culture of Europe and from that of the ancestral traditions and of the par excellence boorish.³⁶

Hungarian ethnographical research at first

¹³ DF: "formulae"

¹⁴ DF: "of only partial appreciation"

¹⁵ DF: "i.e. it has"

¹⁶ DF: "oriental qualities"

¹⁷ DF: "and while these qualities"

¹⁸ DF deleted this word.

¹⁹ DF: "refer to it"

²⁰ DF: "as"

²¹ DF deleted this part of the sentence.

²² DF: "on September 8th"

²³ DF: "the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary"

²⁴ DF: "for associations of"

²⁵ DF: "This example"

²⁶ DF: "traditions"

²⁷ DF: "where"

²⁸ DF: "have been absorbed"

²⁹ DF: "e.g."

³⁰ DF: "This serves to prove"

³¹ DF: "a dualism"

³² DF deleted these words

³³ DF deleted these words

³⁴ DF: "This"

³⁵ DF: "extreme simplification"

³⁶ DF: "ancestral and primitive traditions"

naturally³⁷ set itself the task of investigating the ancient or ancestral. This attitude was perfectly in keeping with the romantic views of European science then in vogue. (We would refer in this connection merely to Rousseauism³⁸, the collecting efforts³⁹ of Bishop Percy, Herder's theory, the researches of the Grimms, etc.). The first important Hungarian folklorists followed the example of Western Europe and also attempted⁴⁰ to reconstruct in its fullness the original religion of the Magyars, together with a complete system of deities, mythology and ancestral epic, as had been done in the case of the mythology of the Northern Germanic peoples. For this work the available material, particularly at that time, offered no assistance at all. The uncertain guesses and rather naive comparative attempts made by these first folklorists were naturally doomed to failure; and they themselves eventually took refuge in fiction. The most important figure of this period was Arnold Ipolyi, who supplemented his noteworthy collection by the addition of the romantic theory of the Grimms and endeavoured to prove from the scanty data at his disposal that the original religion of the Magyars was one of the most perfect examples of primitive monotheism. It goes without saying that his whole construction is fundamentally wrong. This romantic and uncritical period was followed by the reaction of a hypercritical school, which among other things actually doubted whether it was possible from the data available to draw any conclusions whatsoever as to the original religion of the Magyars or the antecedents of our popular epic. Their caution certainly made our scholars more sober; but research could not possibly take their rather barren attitude as the last word in the matter.

What has Hungarian folklore to tell us in this question? Historical research and the ethnological investigation into the history of the

peoples linguistically allied to us has at any rate proved that the original religion of the Magyars was undoubtedly shamanism, - the shamanism of the peoples of Northern Europe. This conclusion is supported, not only by historical suppositions and ethnological analogies, but also by the evidence of the Hungarian folklore of today. I would like to adduce one or two instances which may serve also to show out of what fragmentary material⁴¹ our ethnographers have had to reconstruct the past in imagination and how obstinately our peasantry cling to the old traditions which have already lost their original meaning. For instance, the "Vasorrú Bába", the so-called Iron-nosed Witch, occurring so often⁴² in our tales, as a person possessing the power of evil magic, (as has been shown by Alexander Solymossy) is to be identified with the man-idol, or rather ancestral spirit, enjoying such respect⁴³ among the shamanists; and it was only under the influence of Christianity that this pagan spirit was converted into an evil-eyed woman who causes the hero of the tale so much trouble. We could naturally continue the enumeration of such fragments entitling us today to speak of the original shamanism of the Magyars with much more justification than our predecessors. The memory of the shamanism and of the shamanistic magic drum, for instance, is preserved in one of our instruments of prophecy; according to one extremely interesting analysis the divining staff of the Hungarian shepherds and warrens is nothing but a fragment - now without its original meaning - of shamanistic cosmogony. Here and there our popular sayings have latent in them elements reminding us of the shamanistic cosmology; and⁴⁴ according to Alexander Solymossy, the Old Shepherd figuring in the popular Hungarian Christmas play - the Play of the Nativity- breathes the spirit of pre-Christian days, his satirical attitude and

³⁷ DF deleted this word

³⁸ DF: "the teachings of Rousseau"

³⁹ DF: "investigations"

⁴⁰ DF: "in an attempt"

⁴¹ DF: "the fragmentary nature of material from which"

⁴² DF: "represented"

⁴³ DF: "much respected"

⁴⁴ DF deleted this word and began a new sentence here.

his refusal to believe during the pious play owing its origin to that fact⁴⁵. I shall refrain for the present from entering into any analysis of these conclusions – which are more than once very strongly hypothetical in character; I merely wished to show the path now being followed by Hungarian research into the primitive religion of the Magyars.

And now, when briefly describing the religious disposition of the peasantry, we must repeat what we have said above concerning the dualism of Hungarian peasant (boorish)⁴⁶ culture. This dualism is not however a peculiarly Hungarian speciality; it is characteristic of all peasant cultures alike, being characteristic however only so long as it remains boorish⁴⁷, - i.e. until the peasants pass beyond the limits of the peasant (boorish)⁴⁸ order of life and until their consciousness reaches a point at which they throw off the more primitive attitude. In the Hungarian peasantry generally – whether Roman Catholic or Protestant or Greek Oriental – the laws and liturgies of positive religion are saturated with boorish⁴⁹ beliefs and superstitions and peculiarly peasant (boorish)⁵⁰ idiosyncrasies and traditions. Indeed, in the case of the Roman Catholics (only sporadically in that of the Protestants) even in the religious sphere the positive religion is interwoven, not only with these peasant superstitions and idiosyncrasies, but also by primitive liturgical usage, - that fact being tacitly accepted by the Churches. For instance, during the church-ale in the Lower Town, Szeged, the morning confession and communion is followed by prayers offered by the peasantry as formulated by their own primitive liturgy, that being followed again by processions and

by improvised prayers uttered under the spell of some ecstatic communal devotion.

However, this peasant dualism of the religious outlook can be seen in every field. The Child Jesus and Virgin Mary figuring in our tales live entirely in the boorish atmosphere of the folk-tale, - as it were with the weapons of typically fabulous powers, the evil and the good magician. For instance, in a tale recently recorded by me in County Szabolcs, we find Christ figuring and employing the weapons exclusively of⁵¹ peasant superstition to overcome the shrewd and cunning Devil. Our Catholic festivals, the worship of our saints, family life, the usages of labour are saturated with elements of peasant belief which cannot be described in detail in this connection. As for the power of the world of beliefs of the peasant community, nothing proves that better⁵² than what I found in one of the villages I visited, - namely a magician or “medicine man” whose magic power was respected far and wide and who himself believed in his skill. For example, he attributed the fertility of his land to his fertilising spells. He had lived for more than ten years in America, where he had been in business, spoke⁵³ English well; he lived and practised his trade under the shadow of a rationalistic culture, but when he returned to his native village, that culture disappeared from his life without leaving any profound effects. In the younger generation, on the other hand, a change is under way in this field too; the dissipation of the peasant communal order has naturally not failed to affect this territory too⁵⁴. Since the Great War we have been witnesses of a transformation of peasant culture becoming ever more and more rapid. Although the economic, material and social roots of this change reach back to the eighteenth century, the breaking up of the form of this culture has

⁴⁵ DF: “in the fact of Holy Nativity” [This modification by DF is based on a misunderstanding of the sentence – LGy]

⁴⁶ DF deleted this word.

⁴⁷ DF: “as long as they remain primitive”

⁴⁸ DF deleted this word.

⁴⁹ DF: “pagan”

⁵⁰ DF deleted this word.

⁵¹ DF: “belonging exclusively to”

⁵² DF: “Nothing can better demonstrate the power of the world of beliefs of the peasant community”

⁵³ DF: “and spoke”

⁵⁴ DF: “have its effect”

only been so⁵⁵ clearly in evidence for a decade or two. A cultural break-up of this kind usually results in the peasantry losing its older order of communal conventions not yet replaced⁵⁶ by any other order of conventions calculated to strongly cement⁵⁷ that society; the latter is⁵⁸ dissolved into atoms, a circumstance that makes its effect felt also on the cultural attitude of the peasants. Just as the older and more primitive cosmography dissolves and the world of folk-tales disappears, this peculiarly peasant religiousness⁵⁹ wears away too. The views of the peasants become more rational and lead them towards a more and more rational⁶⁰ attitude, although in the nature of things the latter is not yet very clearly in evidence.

When we investigate the creations of our people in Hungarian folklore, -tales, ballads, folklore-melodies, - we once more come across features which the Western European inquirer is quite unable under any circumstances to find anywhere in West Europe. Even in Hungary today they are anything but frequent. It is difficult today to find even in Hungary isolated story-tellers, - so-called "Yarn-spinners" - and the older rhythm of our folk-music is disappearing too. Only - a circumstance about which we may hear in another talk - whereas the older rhythm of our folk-songs now disappearing is being replaced by a newer one, which is constantly making more and more headway, the extinction of the folk-tale is unchecked, for the process of extinction is originally connected with the transformation of our peasant culture as a whole. The life of the folk-song is not particularly affected by the rationalisation of views of life; but the rationalistic attitude is a serious menace to the folk-tale, particularly where the tale itself is only a humiliating reminder of the past which

he has left behind and is actually ashamed of to the peasant awaking to full consciousness⁶¹. When we survey the Hungarian folk-tales that have been collected, we find that material affording⁶² interesting data relative to the peculiar position of the Magyars in Europe. Certain motives of our tales are closely connected with the traditions of the Ural-Altaic legends and deviate from the tales found in Western Europe. According to Solymossy, for instance, - who has done more than any other inquirer to throw light on these motives, - the motive of a castle revolving on a duck's foot or on the foot of some other bird is a remnant of shamanistic cosmography. As against this theory John Honti has pointed out that we find the motive of a castle revolving by magic in the West European epics already in the Middle Ages and that the same motive occurs in Celtic epics too. However, the analyses may quite easily show that whereas the revolving castle of the West European version usually merely appears to revolve and never moves on the foot of any bird, in those of our tales which preserve shamanistic memories the characteristic point is that the castle does actually revolve on some bird's foot. We might enumerate other examples, - for instance, the mare's milk bath as a reminiscence of the Ural-Altaic horse-cult found in our tales; while the observations in our tales relating to the primitive system of cosmography also reach back to the world of Ural-Altaic mythology. However, when we investigate the three typical groups of Hungarian tales, - the beast stories, the so-called "true" tales and the playful tricky tales, - we see quite clearly that the material of the Hungarian tales fits without a hitch into the system of European tales. If we group our tales according to the system known as the Aarne-Thompson system invented by the two prominent representatives of the Finnish geographical-historical school, we cannot help

⁵⁵ DF deleted this word

⁵⁶ DF: "before they can be replaced"

⁵⁷ DF: "cement with strength"

⁵⁸ DF: "which in consequence"

⁵⁹ DF: "attitude to religion"

⁶⁰ DF: "rationalistic"

⁶¹ DF: "of which the peasant awaking to full consciousness is becoming actually ashamed"

⁶² DF: "in them"

unconsciously thinking of the famous lines Goethe's "Faust":

"Hier dacht' ich lauter Unbekannte,
Und finde leider Nahverwandte,
Es ist ein altes Buch zu blättern,
Vom Harz bis Hellas immer Vettern!"

And we do indeed find tales related to ours everywhere, whether we look backwards, or merely have a look round among our neighbours. The most ancient records of human history – the records of the "subconscious" sphere of our humanity – haunt our beast stories and our aetiological sagas, and loom large in many a magic belief of the tales. Our tales do indeed preserve memories dating from all periods of the history of the tale – from the motive of transformation to be found already in the tales placed beside the mummies of Egyptian children. Like those of all other peoples, the Hungarian collection of tales also belongs to the huge and intricate network the basic origin of which has not yet been ascertained with any certainty. Arabian, Persian, Celtic tale-elements, the beliefs of medieval Christianity, Renaissance *novelle*, and anecdotes of a literary character blend in a kaleidoscopic jumble. Nor need we waste much time pointing out that tales akin to our own are to be found among the surrounding peoples; and it is the work of philological research to show how much of our epic traditions is our own contribution and how much we have received from elsewhere; as against the older nationalistic bias both parties must naturally establish the fact that the influence was a reciprocal one. Of course, if we had time, we could reveal more hidden connections too; we could show sporadic traces of one or other of the beautiful stories of the West European and Oriental epics may be found surviving in some scattered Hungarian superstitions or beliefs: we could show, for instance, how the motive of the "Unquiet Grave", one of the most famous ballads, figuring in Child's magnificent collection, is found recurring in the funeral superstitions of Hungary. All these things merely prove the great

unity connecting the intellectual assets of those days. Unfortunately we do not know enough to ascertain whether these kindred elements are to be explained satisfactorily as the result of the geographical fact of migration or of the psychological principle of the "*Elementargedanke*" or of the sociological principle of identical situations.

It may be of interest to say a few words concerning story-telling, – concerning the function of the tale, – in the life of peasantry. When we examine the question sociologically, the first thing we are impelled to establish is that story-telling is the recreation of the poorer peasants; the well-to-do peasant farmer would regard it as *infra dig* (beneath his dignity)⁶³ to tell a tale, though he is quite prepared to listen to stories of an evening; but he does not take any active part, – we may safely ignore the exceptions⁶⁴, – in the preservation or handing down of tales. The latter task has been undertaken by the poorer peasantry, – usually old beggars or warrens or women workers. – Traditions revive in their hands, – usually when doing work, – the rapidity and smooth progress of which is not disturbed by listening to the tales. We find this, for instance, in the case of tobacco-packing, and corn-hulling, and in spinneries. The story-tellers naturally tell their tales with the free variations of oral tradition though I have frequently come across a story-teller, who, though unable to read, had the gift of building up new stories out of the material read to him out of books, though his version was by no means a slavish one: while others again merely repeat the tales they have read or some "Grub Street" story, in a rather perfunctory manner. It is indubitable, that the less a story-teller is affected by our higher culture the more striking and highly coloured his manner of telling. There are story-tellers from whom their villages expect only certain stories, – for example, stories of a pornographic character, – finding the telling of such stories a distraction; but "specialists" of

⁶³ DF: "beneath his dignity"

⁶⁴ DF: "except in the case of" [This modification by DF is based on a misunderstanding of the sentence – LGy]

the kind, - if I may use the term, - are rather rare, because a good story-teller usually has a considerable material at his disposal. I myself quite recently came across an old story-teller of eighty who knows enough interesting stories to fill volumes. It is quite certain, anyhow, that today we know of hardly any story-tellers of the kind; and seeing that the younger generations no longer take part in the preservation of the tales, (I have only rarely seen any signs of their doing so,) we must expect that in a few years the living tale will become mute in Hungary too, as in all other countries in which the peasantry is losing its older form of culture.

Another very valuable group of Hungarian folklore is our collection of popular ballads. And indeed the scholars who were primarily in search of aesthetic beauties, were perfectly justified in saying, that in perfection of form the Hungarian popular ballad is the Central European rival of the beauties of the Anglo-Scotch ballads. The monumental dignity and dramatic character of the form and its plastic strength must indeed deeply affect everyone; what a pity that it is so difficult to preserve the original beauties in translation. It goes without saying, that our popular ballads, - as being a branch of a European genre, not so very ancient in date, (reaching back as it does only to the twelfth or thirteenth century), - show ever closer kinship with the European popular epics than do our peasant tales. The origin of our popular ballads may be traced back definitely to the fifteenth century. Naturally here too it is possible to point also older traditions, - strange to say, in a comparatively recent stage of the popular ballad style; for our "highwaymen" ballads contain vague reminiscences of the epic form of the Ugrian heroic song spoken in the first person shown to date back to the period of Finn-Ugrian community. I do not propose on the present occasion to point to the ethnological significance of this fact; I would merely note that our ballads often contain primitive traditions differing entirely from those of the West European types.

In the ballad "Kádár Kata" ("Kitty Kádár"), for example, the motive of the handkerchief turning red as a sign that the two lovers have got into trouble is to be found already in the tales told by the Egyptian Maspero. The motive of human sacrifice occurring in the ballad "Kőműves Kelemené" ("Mistress Clement Mason") takes us back to the far-distant spheres of comparative ethnology. (It should be noted that we have only Central and South-Eastern European versions of the latter ballad.)

If we would classify our ballads, we must distinguish several groups. We have, for instance, first of all the epic ballads of a historical character that reach back to the days of the struggles between the Hungarians and the Turks. Their style is more monumental and colder; and they breathe the air of the historical songs. To this group belong also these of our ballads, which, though their subjects are not historical, contain traditions which certainly centuries old. They are highly coloured, gloomy and hard; the epic course of their style is broken by dramatic elements; this group comprises our most beautiful popular ballads. The more recent ballad-style must have to some extent been transformed by the influence of "Grub Street": the subjects are stories of faithlessness in love of our highwaymen; the style is looser, the course of the story easier and smoother, while in structure these ballads show a closer kinship with the other groups of our folksongs, the other older popular ballads forming a separate group also in respect of structure. In connection with our ballads it must be noted, that the most frequent form of the North and West European ballad, - that with a refrain, - is only very exceptionally to be found in Hungary, seeing that we have very few dance-ballads either⁶⁵. Unfortunately, as a consequence of the mistaken methods of collection in vogue previously, only the text of very many extremely beautiful Hungarian ballads has been preserved, the tunes not have been recorded by the collectors, though there can be

⁶⁵ DF: "as we have very few dance-ballads"

no doubt that those tunes would have given us numerous ancient themes, as is proved by the material contained in the collection of ballad-music made by Messrs.⁶⁶ Kodály and Bartók. In conclusion I must note that the finest items of the treasure-house of Hungarian popular ballads have been recorded in Transylvania, among the Székelys, (the so-called Széklers,) although – as research has shown – the same ballads were extant also in the Lowlands and in Trans-Danubia and even in the Highlands. And yet, when we hear of Hungarian ballads, the first to occur to us are the popular ballads of the Székelys. I may mention in passing that in 1863 certain Romanian folklorists questioned the authenticity of the Székely ballads (in the so-called “Wild Rose” case) and asserted that our ballads are of the Romanian origin. Today, naturally, comparative folklore research has done away with all such nationalistic misinterpretations and bias; and, though it is indubitable that there are certain common Magyar-Romanian ballad-subjects, (subjects shared in common with many other peoples too), the origin of the themes is wrapped in obscurity and it is perhaps quite superfluous to broach the question of origins from that standpoint.

Finally, a few words must be said concerning our folk-songs, though of course in a short summary of the kind we cannot possibly deal with every branch of Hungarian folklore. It would not be worthwhile to classify our folk-songs by subjects. Again, in connection with the question of folk-music much will be said later-on concerning the problem of the form of folk-poetry; for the tune and the text are absolutely inseparable in the case of a folk-song. Even where the tune and the text are not in permanent connection, – even where the tune may be attached to other texts and where the text may find other suitable tunes – the important point is, that there never is a text without a tune. All these matters will be dealt with in the talk concerning folk-music. What

⁶⁶ DF deleted this word.

I would do here is rather to point out briefly that in Hungarian folk-poetry the creative ability of the community is still a living force. I do not propose in this connection to deal with the question of the relation between individual and community in peasant culture. There can be no doubt, of course, that ultimately it is the individual who is the creator of the song and the text; after all every act of creation demands individual initiative and inventiveness. In the peasant culture of Hungary, (and indeed in all peasant cultures, as has been proved also by the investigations of the British scholar Sharp⁶⁷), however⁶⁸, no individual conceit or suggestion has ever been able to become a folk-song or a treasure of general acceptance in a popular culture unless it has accommodated itself to the principles of the communal conventions of style. Naturally these conventions of style have been always subject to changes, being formed and transformed constantly by individual initiative. But they have at all times been a guiding and shaping force; and everything not sanctioned by convention very soon disappeared as a version without function or influence. The Hungarian folk-song shows many stages, having during the course of history absorbed innumerable new elements: nevertheless, this impersonal folk-song material handed on orally from generation to generation is uniform, the several stages of style in themselves constituting a consistent whole. We are therefore able to observe in our folk-songs the laws governing popular creation still at work: folk-songs are found coming into being even today. This is the group of folk-culture that is most enduring and best able to resist all changes of system and all social transformations.

The above is a short survey of the more important fields of Hungarian folklore. We have of course passed over many things in silence, – that being due to the lack of space and not to the material being scanty. We might have spoken of the dramatic customs of our people, which are

⁶⁷ DF: “Cecil Sharp”

⁶⁸ DF deleted this word

also an interesting blending of ancestral tradition and ethnological custom with European influences. We might have spoken of our dances, which have also for the most part preserved reminiscences of ancient dance-forms, that of Hungarian peasant, and that of Hungarian lord. We might have spoken of our children's games too, which also contain numerous fragmentary elements of primitive Hungarian traditions. To do so would however have far exceeded the limits at our disposal. I have not entered into a discussion either of the character of the structure of the Hungarian peasantry; for such character sketches are usually arbitrary and the ideas comprised in them rather obscure. They may be specious, but they do not tell us much.

Nor have I been able to make any use of the specious racial definitions. Should there be any need of such, no doubt they will be explained in the psychological talks. *

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